

Attorney affirms Guantanamo detainees continue to be tortured by CIA physically, mentally



New York, October 9 (RHC)-- "Torture has always existed at Guantanamo Bay in different forms and the inmates there continue to be tortured physically and psychologically," says a U.S.-based human rights attorney.

In an interview with the Press TV website, Alka Pradhan, who has represented Guantanamo Bay detainees as well as victims of U.S. drone strikes, described various forms of torture prevalent at the notorious and illegal U.S. detention facility, also known as Gitmo, in southeastern Cuba.

"In the early days, it took the form of beatings and forced nudity, starvation and force-feedings, and other terrible techniques," said Pradhan, referring to the institutionalizing of torture at the U.S. prison. "Now, decades of arbitrary detention, and lack of family visits and medical care – including botched or

substandard procedures carried out by poorly qualified staff - continue to torture these men psychologically and physically.”

Pradhan, one of the leading human rights lawyers in the US, is currently Human Rights Counsel at the Guantanamo Bay Military Commissions. She was previously Counter-Terrorism Counsel at Reprieve US, where she represented several Guantanamo Bay detainees. She also conducted advocacy and litigation on behalf of civilian victims of US drone strikes in Yemen and Pakistan and has advised the US government on compliance with international legal obligations.

Last week, Pradhan was invited to the European Parliament to speak on Gitmo human rights abuses amid growing calls from human rights advocates to shut down the notorious US detention center.

She is an attorney representing Ammar al-Baluchi, an Iranian citizen, who has suffered high-degree torture at the hands of the CIA and even denied medical care by the White House. “Ammar, an Iranian citizen, was brutally tortured for 3.5 years at the “black sites” - the CIA’s secret prisons all over the world - before he was rendered to Guantanamo Bay in September 2006,” Pradhan told the Press TV website.

“According to CIA records, CIA personnel used him as a human experiment, bashing his head against a wall over and over again for hours, to obtain their interrogator certifications. They also tortured him using water, shackling his wrists over his head, beatings, forced nudity, and forced starvation. For most of his time at the black sites, he was sleep-deprived, first with ear-splitting music, and then with 24/7 fluorescent lights,” she hastened to add.

Ammar, the American human rights attorney, said is 46 years old today and suffers from multiple brain injuries because of CIA torture as well as severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), inability to sleep normally and cognitive decline, denied proper medical care by the US government.

“They will not allow medical histories to be taken that discuss the causes of his ailments (torture), the DoD (US Department of Defense) will not allow independent doctors to treat him, and according to the Chief Medical Officer, they do not have the ability to provide complex medical care or do proper surgeries here,” she said.”

“Despite entreaties, the White House and DoD have absolutely refused to either implement a proper medical and torture rehabilitation program here or conduct humanitarian transfers of the remaining men to places where they can receive the care they need.”

Pradhan also spoke about the Guantanamo military commissions set up by the US government that have only exacerbated the miserable conditions of Gitmo inmates.

These military commissions, she said in a conversation with the Press TV website, were built to “benefit from CIA torture while hiding as many details of the torture program as possible.”

“The U.S. government made a conscious decision after 9/11 to torture men abroad instead of bringing them to court for prosecution. Once they could no longer hide them in secret prisons, it was too late to prosecute them in real US courts because of that torture,” Pradhan said.

“The Military Commissions Act was written to allow the government to use torture-acquired evidence (the bulk of their evidence against these men), but also to prevent them from giving the defense the information we require about exculpatory or mitigating factors - like the men’s torture in CIA black sites,” she added.

The U.S.-based attorney said the US government has “continuously invaded attorney-client privilege, with listening devices in our meeting rooms and the FBI attempting to place an informant on one defense team”, noting that the corruption in the military commissions “precludes any justice.”

On why the U.S. government chose a detention facility in Cuba, away from the mainland, to detain people after the 9/11 attacks, Pradhan said the decision was taken so that the US “exercises complete control” and international and domestic laws do not apply. “To this day, the US refuses to apply the Constitution in the military commissions, or the full provisions of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions to the remaining detainees. And the detainees themselves have no real legal remedies - they are not allowed to file lawsuits in the United States, and no country will sanction the US for its illegal treatment of these men,” she stated.

The international calls for the closure of the notorious detention facility have grown louder, but the Joe Biden administration, like previous administrations, has adopted the policy of dilly-dallying.

Pradhan said the strength of the US propaganda campaign around Guantanamo at the beginning, “labeling all of the men here the “worst of the worst” and categorizing them all as some sort of combatant against the United States, has proven impossible to reverse.”

“Despite the fact that no one should ever have been held at Guantanamo, that most were sold to the US for bounty payments, and that only a handful have ever been charged, most Americans still believe that Guantanamo detainees are all terrorists,” she told the Press TV website.

“President Obama had the ability to tell the truth about the men at Guantanamo, even when Congress stopped him from closing the facility, but he did not. The enduring misinformation about the detainees means that many countries do not want to accept them and that Congress has banned any transfers of the men to US territory.”

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